

[On Shabbat, September 16, we officially welcomed Rabbi Marci Jacobs as Temple Emunah's first Assistant Rabbi. Our President, Lester Blumberg, shared words of welcome, and Rabbi David Lerner offered Rabbi Jacobs blessing as he installed her in her position. Below is the d'var Torah delivered in response.]

As I stand here before you today, honored to be in your presence as you officially welcome me as your new Assistant Rabbi, I am reminded of a metaphor from our Parasha, Parashat Nitzavim. Having presented to בני ישראל [*b'nei yisrael*] the terms of their covenant with God, Moshe shares with them the promise of that covenantal relationship: protection, turning toward God, and a return to wholeness as a people. This idea of turning and returning is the most prominent theme here. In the ten short verses of this section of our reading, words for turning and returning—from the Hebrew root שׁוּב [*shuv*]¹—are repeated 7 times. In Chapter 30, verse 2, we read: וּשְׁבַת עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ [*v'shavta ad Adonai elohekha*], and you return to the LORD your God. Verse 3—וּשְׁבַת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתְךָ וְרַחֲמֶךָ [*v'shav Adonai elohekha et sh'vut'kha v'rihamekha*]²—then the LORD your God will return to you your fortunes and take you back in love. וַיָּשֶׁב וַיָּקִיץ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים [*v'shav v'kibetzkha mikol ha-amim*]³—and God will bring

you back together again from all the peoples among whom you were scattered.

Such an outstanding motif leads us to stop and consider the significance of this idea. This passage acknowledges and describes how turning can have dire consequences—בני ישראל [b'nei yisrael] might turn away toward alien gods. And in fact the beginning of this passage speaks of the curses that would come as a result of this kind of turning. But turning can also be the way in which God and the people find each other. It is this process of turning and returning—both on the part of בני ישראל [b'nei yisrael] and on the part of God—which will actualize the covenant, and help both the people and God find the wholeness that can only be achieved in relationship with each other. In fact, the medieval Spanish commentator Ramba"n, or Nahmanides, sees in this passage the source for the mitzvah of Teshuvah, repentance. Drawing on the repetition of the word for return, שׁוּב [shuv], which is also the root for Teshuvah, he explains that the description of the renewed relationship between God and Israel in this passage serves as model for the renewal we can experience each new year as the opportunity for Teshuvah arises. This is very much on our minds now, as we are about to enter into a new year and focus on our own acts of Teshuvah. It is in fact tonight, on the

heels of this Parasha when we begin saying the Selihot prayers, heralding the new year and our process of Teshuvah.

This idea of turning and returning also speaks to me as a new rabbi, because so many of my years in preparation for the rabbinate have been about this kind of turning—this turning in order to return. I turned toward my professors, my teachers, and mentors, to sit at their feet and learn from their Torah, which help to foster in me my love of Jewish thought and my delight in the logical and illogical workings of the Talmud and other works of Rabbinic Literature. I turned toward my classmates and friends, to learn from their Torah, and to appreciate the diverse possibilities that being a rabbi held in store. I found in them *hevrotot*—study partners, and *barei plugta*—friends who I could always count on to offer me alternative views. I turned toward the sacred texts, the history, and the laws of our tradition, to try to hear my own modern voice in their ancient volumes. And I struggled with them—as a woman, as a scholar, and as a Jew living at the turn of the 21st century. I turned toward Israel, breathed in the air and mourned the violence. In Israel, I appreciated what it was to be a member of the minority, to feel the sting of discrimination against liberal religious Judaism, and I uncovered the activist inside me, being hushed and hissed at with Women of the Wall

and enduring a barrage of physical and verbal attacks with an egalitarian minyan joining for prayer on the morning of Shavuot. Trying to find my way, I turned toward chaplaincy, education, and Camp Ramah, and instead found different parts of myself. I established myself as a teacher, taking my love of children and my love of learning and bringing them together to foster fun, excitement, and growth. Sitting with people in pain both physical and spiritual, I found my pastoral voice. I turned toward internships and student pulpits in synagogues, not knowing at first that this would be my path.

Originally, I thought that this process of turning was a means to an end, that each place I turned would give me something else I needed to meet my goal of becoming a rabbi. But really, each stop along the way was its own end. Each stop helped me become a little more myself. And I didn't know how much I would grow, or in which direction, until I reached my next destination. Which led me here, to Temple Emunah. When I first arrived here in March for my interview weekend, I was nervous, scared that the connection to and enthusiasm for this community that I felt through questionnaires and preliminary conversations would disappear. But when I first set foot into our building, I felt that I had returned, that all of my turning had brought me home. And, over that

first weekend, as I had the opportunity to meet so many warm, welcoming, and passionate members of our community, and the honor to share some of my thoughts and ideas with you, that sense of returning began to deepen and take root.

Now, as I stand here today, having been officially welcomed to the Temple Emunah community, I am mindful of the blessings that my return has bestowed upon me. I feel embraced by your excitement, grateful for the friendship and mentoring presence of Rabbi Lerner, for the devoted stewardship of Lester Blumberg, the members of our board, and the leaders of our many flourishing committees. And I am excited. I am excited to be a part of this community that is such a leader in the greater Boston Jewish community and in our movement as a whole. I am excited to work as our Family Educator, to offer the richness of our tradition through programming, classes, and events, and to think about what it means to focus on our families within the context of our greater Temple Emunah family. I am excited to work with our innovative adult education projects, and to open up pathways to participation and enfranchisement within the Jewish world through the development of an adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah program. I am excited to work with our children and youth, to teach and nurture them, and to be a part of their lives as

they transition to adulthood in our community. And I am excited that I have been given this priceless opportunity to be your rabbi, to learn with you and from you, and to grow together on our spiritual paths. As we officially begin our journey together today, I am looking forward to it being one of learning and laughter, of comfort and community, and of the turning and returning that bring us into relationship with each other and with God. Shabbat Shalom.